

Israel (continued)

Some mention of the mysterious Bedouins is necessary at this point. The portion of this Arab people that lives in the Negev and the Sinai has remained oblivious to the changing world around it, choosing to retain its ancient traditions. They live in the most hostile areas of the desert where little water is to be found, seeking out an existence as nomadic shepherds. Their poverty is great. They are not to be pitied, however, as they are a proud and content people who consciously chose to retain their identity. Hospitality abounds, and all visitors are made welcome. The children are extremely attentive to strangers, eager to learn about them and perhaps receive small gifts. The women, on the contrary, while waiting on their husbands and guests are very elusive. They have been taught to have great modesty, being dressed in long black robes, and are forbidden to show their faces to any man save their husbands. Despite their different race, religion and culture the Bedouin have always gotten along well with the Israelis. These two peoples are a model of constructive coexistence.

The Mediterranean coastal area is in marked contrast to the deserts to the south, as it is the country's most populous and industrialized region. Tel Aviv is Israel's commercial and cultural center. It is a young city, not quite seventy years old, which has grown up quickly. Tel Aviv was originally founded by Jewish immigrants in response to poor and unsanitary living conditions in the neighbouring ancient port city of Jaffa, and today it bears the distinction of being the world's only city of all-Jewish origin. However, this distinction seems to have had little impact on Israelis. Tel Aviv's rapid growth has made it a congested city, with many of the unattractive characteristics of fast-paced North American urban life. As a result, it is the subject of many an Israeli put-down, or of downright criticism. Nevertheless, this city is not without its pleasant spots.

A hot afternoon walk down Dizengoff street, a broad, tree-shaded boulevard, lined with chic cafes and interesting shops, left a favourable impression after our first day in Israel.

Haifa is the capital of the north and Israel's second largest coastal city. Its streets twist and turn their way up the face of Mount Carmel, overlooking Haifa Bay and the neighbouring city of Akko. The Carmel Range has been a symbol of beauty since Biblical times — in the words of George Adam Smith "one of the most sublime prospects of earth and sea and heaven." Today it is testimony of another kind of magnificence. For centuries depleted and neglected, the Carmel Range has been a site of the intensive afforestation in Palestine, beginning with the advent of Jewish settlement in the nineteenth century. Today acres of man-made forest stretch their way through these mountains bearing witness to the hard work and dedication of Jewish settlers building a homeland.

Before departing for Israel, I had been warned about Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a beautiful and mystical city. Her beauty takes form in the jumble of narrow passageways, stairs and tunnels which twist their way through the Old City; the impressive 16th century Turkish wall which surrounds this enclave; the Church of All Nations with its fronton decorated with a large coloured and gilt mosaic picturing Christ weeping over the fate of the Holy City; the Church of St. Mary Magdalene with its seven onion-shaped golden domes; the Mosque of Omar or Dome of the Rock whose impressive golden dome sits on an octagonal base of marble and brightly coloured mosaics. . . With virtually no exceptions, Jerusalem is constructed from a tawny local limestone, known regionally as "Jerusalem stone", which imparts an aesthetic radiance on the city, hence its ancient nickname, "The Golden."

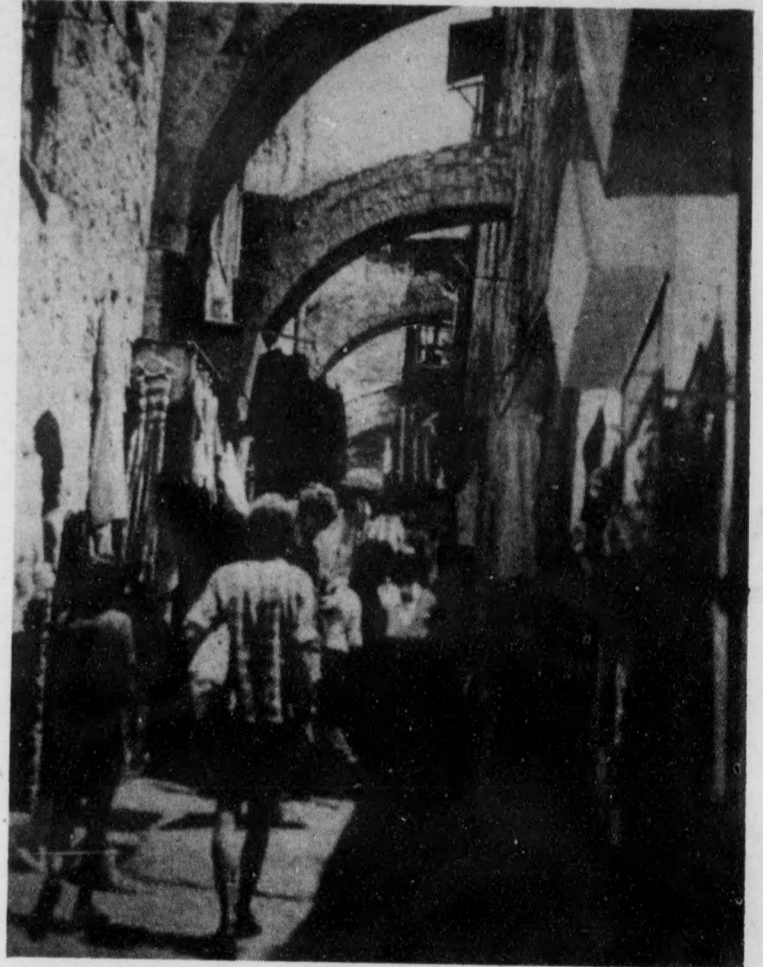
Although the aesthetic beauty of Jerusalem is unique and unquestionable, her allurements are due in large measure to Jerusalem as a symbol, as a city whose long and rich history has had an unparalleled influence on the shaping of western thought and civilization and as the sacred city of three major religions. Jerusalem is venerated by Christians as the place where Jesus was crucified. The thirteen stations of the Via Dolorosa in the Old City mark the way taken by Jesus from the place where he was condemned to Golgotha, to the traditional sites of His Crucifixion, Burial and Resurrection, presently enshrined by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it is the holiest sanctuary of Christendom. Jews have a unique and mystical attachment to Jerusalem which has remained unbroken since David proclaimed it the capital of Israel, almost three thousand years ago. Since the Jews' exile to Babylon, in 586 B.C., they have cherished Jerusalem as the symbol of their return to Zion. Today the most sacred Jewish site is the Western Wall, a colossal fragment of the structure which surrounded the Second Temple before its desecration by Roman invaders in 70 A.D. The Wall is a site of prayer and festivity. Often one can see religious Jews embracing the ancient and weathered stone in deep meditation or a boy being Bar Mitzvah — the ceremony that marks his entry into manhood. At sundown on Friday, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath is celebrated by groups of people, arm in arm dancing the Hora, a traditional Jewish folk dance. Finally, Jerusalem is the third holiest city of Islam, after Mecca and Medina, being the place from which Mohammed is believed to have ascended to heaven. In addition to the afore mentioned Mosque of Omar, the silver domed Al Asqua Mosque is one of the holiest shrines of Islam.

Along with the diversity of religion in Jerusalem, has evolved a diversity of peoples and cultures. Jerusalem is not a melting pot — each of its people have studiously retained their traditions and values. The end result is a rich mosaic of attitudes, values and lifestyles. In the colourful Arab market of the Old City, one can see an Arab shop owner in heated debate with a customer over the price of his merchandise. Only a few blocks away, Hassidim, the most Orthodox of Jews, prepare for the Sabbath or engage in rigorous study of Talmudic literature — their long earlocks, broad-brimmed hats and dark garments making them living relics of their Russian ancestors of the eighteenth century.

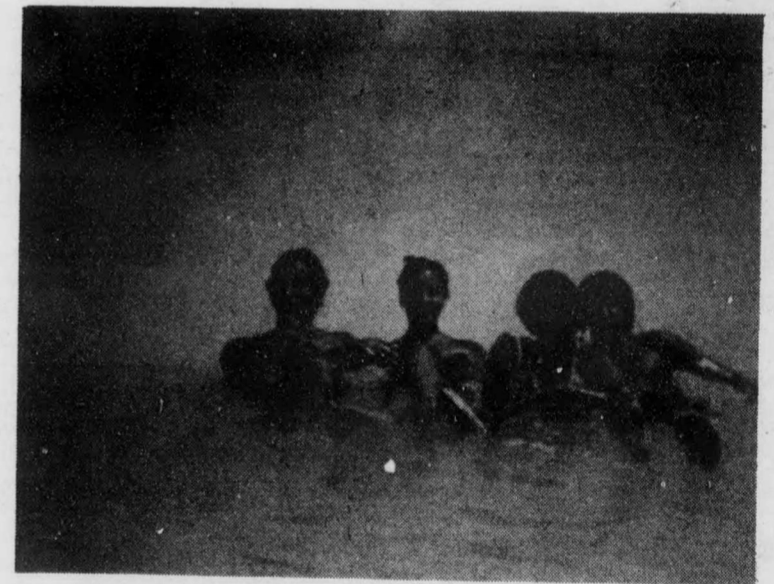
Jerusalem is distinguished by the love and spiritual inspiration that has been attributed to her throughout the eras of history, fostered by her link to *The Bible* and the biblical philosophers and teachers which she inspired. Her familiarity to more people in more parts of the world is unprecedented. A score of invading armies have not altered her symbolic value to the people who cherish her, nor has a history of material destruction. She is above all, a triumph of the spirit. To modern Israel, she is the most treasured link to a glorious but ancient past — to the Biblical events that inspired the nation's creation.

Israeli soldiers and Interested Cameramen

This shot was taken at a concert by the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra at one of the Good Fences, on the border with Lebanon.



A Portion of the Christian Market in the Old City of Jerusalem



Floating On The Dead Sea, in the Negev

